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SIR HENRY RAEBURN  
PORTRAIT OF HON. HENRY DAVID ERSKINE  
PURCHASED, 1920



## A PORTRAIT BY SIR HENRY RAEBURN

Aside from the splendid landscapes of Gainsborough, Old Crome, Constable and others, painted largely in the pleasurable pursuit of nature and without much interest on the part of the picture buying public, and the further exceptions of Turner, with his grandiloquent landscapes which were eagerly sought because of their subject, and Hogarth the satirist and moralist, the painter's problem of the XVIII century in England was a pretty constant problem. The appellation of "portrait manufacturers" given by Hogarth to Sir Joshua Reynolds and his contemporaries was somewhat truthfully if enviously applied. A painter's studio was not unlike a dentist's office. Half hour appointments were given to each patron, of which there were a long list each day, and the artist not only left the preparation of canvas, brushes and palette to his assistant, but the backgrounds were also painted in by a lesser hand. Raeburn in the Scotch capital of Edinburgh, however, never followed this practice of the London men but painted the picture himself from start to finish.

Yet the impulse to preserve to posterity the likeness of nobility and fashion, insular and provincial though it may have been, was an impulse quite as true to its environment as that which brought

forth the masterpieces of Florentine art under the Medici princes, the remarkable works of Velasquez under Philip IV of Spain, or the delightful genre of the Low Countries inspired by a reaction toward nature from a too rigorous religious domination.

The painters of Britain turned naturally to the portrait field, having back of them that unbroken tradition established by the English Monarchs in importing Holbein, VanDyck, Kneller, Lely, and other lesser artists to paint the men and women of their courts. Sir Joshua Reynolds gave a tremendous impetus to portraiture, not only through his own prolific efforts, but through his inspiration to the many artists about him. He was so much the vogue that his manner or style was freely appropriated by many other painters of the time, and now, after the lapse of more than a century, when we enter an exhibition of the works of Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney, Lawrence, Raeburn, and others of the period, we find a singular unity in their works, and most of them possess those substantial qualities that make them endure with the fine things of the ages.

This unity of purpose, however, and the superficial similarity of manner does not preclude the possibility of a marked individuality in the men of this movement. When



their works are studied individually they reveal the personal characteristics of their creators to a marked degree.

We have recently acquired by purchase the "*Portrait of Hon. Henry David Erskine*," afterwards Earl of Buchan, by Sir Henry Raeburn (Plate I). Let us review the character of the work of this painter, who in spite of his Scotch parentage and lifelong residence in Edinburgh, is regarded as one of the best of the English masters.

Sir Henry Raeburn was born in a suburb of Edinburgh, March 4, 1756. At the time of his birth Reynolds, who was to be somewhat of an influence in his art, was already established in London with more than one hundred fashionable sitters annually. The son of an old Border family, Raeburn became an orphan at the age of six and was brought up by his brother, twelve years his senior, until he reached school age, when he was sent probably to Heriot's Hospital for his early education. At the age of fifteen he was apprenticed to a goldsmith in Edinburgh, and a year later, showing some talent at miniature painting, he was introduced to David Martin, a mediocre portrait painter of the time, from whom he received instruction for a brief time and then took up the pursuit of painting as his life work. At the age of twenty-two we find him married to Ann Edgar, the charming

widow of Count Leslie, and possessed of a fine Edinburgh home and considerable wealth.

In 1785, Raeburn visited London, where he paid his respects to Sir Joshua Reynolds, some thirty years his senior, and then went to Rome in accordance with the precedent established by Reynolds, where he spent two years in perfecting his technique. Unlike Reynolds, however, he was not of an eclectic turn of mind, and he came back to Edinburgh with a formula for success somewhat unusual in that day, but which is generally practiced today, viz: "to always work from nature."

Upon the death of his brother he succeeded to the estate and moved into the house in which he was born and which adjoined his wife's property. Here he led a tranquil and happy life divided between industry and the wholesome recreation of golf, angling, and other outdoor diversions. Upon his return to his native city after his visit to Rome he rose at once to the head of his profession in Scotland and held this eminent place without a rival as long as he lived. He was often designated "The Scottish Reynolds" or "The Scottish Velasquez."

How many portraits he painted in his remaining thirty-five years is not known, as he never kept a record of them nor did he sign and date them, but the number is enormous and one may approximate their dates as we do in the work recently acquired, by estimating the



age of the sitter and then looking up the dates of his birth and death.

Raeburn had a host of lifelong friends among the distinguished men of his time. One of the foremost of these was Sir Walter Scott. It was not until 1814 that he sent pictures to the Royal Academy at London and that year he was elected an associate, to be followed in 1815 with the honor of Royal Academician. In 1822 he was sought out for honor at the hands of King George IV when he was knighted and made Scottish painter to the king.

It seems incredible that Raeburn, almost wholly self-taught, should have reached the heights that make us marvel before his pictures today. That summary, concise manner of painting which he acquired more and more as the years went by, must have been inspired by an inherent love of his medium of expression. With only the guidance of nature, of which he was a close and keen observer, he has created a manner entirely his own—one that will at once rank with the work of the old masters and at the same time bears a close kinship to modern painting. He was the best painter in a technical sense among his English contemporaries, using his brush with a facility that is astonishing even in this day of Sargent and others when the power of applying pigment with certainty and ease has been developed to an exaggerated

degree. In fact, he might be regarded as the artistic grandparent of Sargent, as there is a kinship between his work and that of the XIX century Frenchmen with whom Sargent as a student was associated, and in our picture there is a notable similarity in their manner of attack and in their felicitous grasp of character. His vigorous style and truthful portrayal was more adapted to the hardy men of his native land than to the grace and beauty of the women, hence the greater success of his portraits of men.

Our portrait is one of distinction in a room full of distinguished things. On the wall where it is surrounded by meritorious works of eminent painters of the past, it commands attention. It somewhat eludes identification off-hand because of a delightfully impersonal quality. It suggests the masterpiece that is achieved by an artist when he has laid aside his mannerisms and technical predilections and, absorbed in his subject, renders it with certainty and ease and without thought of its technical processes or difficulties. It possesses a dignity and a simplicity that leaves nothing to be desired. It is one of those unlabored emanations that come from a great artist's brush but few times in his career. It seems to have in it the vital experiences of a life-time, but submerged so as not to trespass upon the vision of the artist's great moment.



The portrait\*, three quarter length, painted about 1805, shows Henry David Erskine as a handsome youth, standing out from the plain dark background. His frank countenance, with well-formed features unseamed by experience, is inspiring in its youthful ideality. His fine head, crowned by a mass of wilful curls, furnishes Raeburn an opportunity to evidence his pleasure in the "broad square touch" with which he so joyfully and summarily rendered the sitter before him. The youth is clad in a black tight-fitting coat and dark trousers, over which he wears a garment of greyed plum color which hangs gracefully and naturally from his shoulders. He thrusts the thumb of his left hand into the dark sash about his waist, while in his gloved right hand he holds his hat against his thigh. The figure is noble and dignified in its apparently unstudied pose and in the natural arrangement of its simple but fine habiliments. The eye travelling over it finds continually new pleasure in the related elements, stopping at the nicely suggested hand that forms the secondary accent of the picture, and going from this to the soft stock collar and the sensitive boyish face. Whistler perhaps more than any other painter taught us the meaning of values—that happy relationship between areas of color—and one finds in this picture much of that quality that Whistler achieves

in the portrait of Carlyle and in the portrait of his mother. The nuances of color are hardly to be excelled by any painter either past or contemporary. The dark costume is gratefully relieved by the plum colored cloak which ties the composition together so beautifully, and the enchanting and almost indefinable color of the cloak is wonderfully enhanced by the black of the costume.

Henry David, twelfth Earl of Buchan, eldest son of the Hon. Henry David Erskine (1746-1817), brother of the eleventh Earl, was born in July, 1783. He married on September 28, 1809, Elizabeth Cole, youngest daughter and co-heir of Major General Sir Charles Shipley, Colonel of Engineers and Governor of Granada.

He succeeded to the earldom in 1829 on the death of his uncle, the eleventh Earl of Buchan.

The Erskine family is one of great antiquity in Scotland and many members of the family attained great prominence. The Earl's father, Hon. Henry Erskine, was a celebrated advocate and wit and M. P. for Dumfries Burghs, Lord Advocate and Dean of the Faculty, and leader of the Whig party in Scotland.

Sir Henry Raeburn painted the father's portrait on two occasions during the year 1805 and about the same time as the present portrait\*.

C. H. B.

\* Mentioned in *Life of Raeburn* by Sir Armstrong, page 101.

\* *Life of Raeburn* by Sir Walter Armstrong, page 101.



## ARE YOU GETTING YOUR SHARE?

The property and collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts now belong to the people of the City of Detroit. How many citizens are getting their share of its benefits? How many turn to it for the wholesome recreation which it affords after the toil of a busy week? How many seek the solace which its treasures of art offer to those beset with sorrows and cares? How many seize the opportunities its special exhibitions, lectures, and musical programs afford? How many survey its treasures with a view of emulation? How many turn to its masterpieces for inspiration and that aesthetic joy that comes in the presence of great accomplishment? A large number, to be sure, but not as many as there should be, considering its compensations. The people of the city may now rightly regard the collections of the Insti-

tute as their property and should take pride in their possession. The Institute and all it contains is the heritage of their children. Standing before its recently acquired painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, or Sir Henry Raeburn, or its splendid examples of Rubens, Murillo, or Claude, they may say, "These belong to *me*. All I am required to do to possess them is to bring to them an appreciation of their beauty." They may examine the rare prints of Durer or Rembrandt and truthfully say, "These are mine, and I am going to possess them in the fullest sense." They may look at the bronze sculptures created by master sculptors and say, "These were done for my enjoyment."

Give the Detroit Institute of Arts a chance to be a gladdening influence in your life. C. H. B.

## TAKE IN THE ANNUAL EXHIBITION

On Wednesday evening, April 20, the Seventh Annual Exhibition of Selected Paintings by American Artists will open to the public. This Exhibition, comprising one hundred paintings chosen with discrimination from practically every important exhibit in this country during the past year, supplemented by works secured directly from the studios of the artists, is brought here by the Arts Commission of the

City of Detroit that the people of this community may see in a comprehensive manner the work of the artists of our time. It should be a gala affair in which every Detroiter should take part. The best artists in America are participants. Many of the pictures are the prize winners in other cities, and along with the out of town works will be hung pictures by artists in Detroit and Michigan, and one may discern by



comparison how effectually the artists of our own town are striving toward the goal of artistic achievement.

Every individual of this city should regard it as a duty to himself to visit this exhibit at least once. He is sure to find in the wide range of subjects something that he will like and that will repay him for his visit, and he will gain a general impression of the trend of American art, whether he bring to the exhibit a highly specialized knowledge of the subject or not.

In organizing this exhibit the Arts Commission are only the agents of the people. It is really their exhibition and they should take

advantage of an unusual opportunity provided for them.

Enclosed in this issue of the Bulletin is a strip of tickets. Will the reader make use of as many of them as he desires and distribute the others among friends, purely for the purpose of stimulating an interest in this wholesome recreation provided by the City of Detroit? We should especially like everyone to come to the opening view on Wednesday evening, April 20. Those who cannot do this will have an opportunity to see the exhibition up to May 30, the Museum being open daily from 9 A. M. to 5 P. M. Sundays from 2 to 6 P. M. and Friday from 7:30 to 9:30 P. M.

C. H. B.

### STAFF APPOINTMENT

Mr. Reginald Poland recently resigned as Director of the Denver Art Association, and has been appointed to our staff as Educational Secretary. Mr. Poland is a graduate of Brown University where he specialized in the Fine Arts; he took the degree of M. A. at Princeton University, won a scholarship at the American Academy at Rome, which he was unable to take advantage of owing to the draft, and while he was waiting for the call he completed

his studies in Fine Arts at Harvard University under Dr. Denman W. Ross. As Director of the Denver Art Association he has had a broad experience in museum work. Mr. Poland will conduct the guide service for the public, outline the educational program whereby the Museum collections will be made of more interest to the people at large, and in general have charge of all educational activities. He will assume his new duties April 15th.



## SCHEDULE OF EXHIBITIONS

- April 1-18.* Schofield-Speicher-Beal Exhibition.
- April 1-18.* Exhibition of Water Colors by American Artists.
- April 1-10.* Scandinavian Exhibition under the auspices of the Recreation Commission.
- April 20-May 30.* Seventh Annual Exhibition of Selected Paintings by American Artists.

## SCHEDULE OF SPECIAL EVENTS

*April:*

- 1st, 7:30 P. M.* Free sketch class under the auspices of the Recreation Commission.
- 3rd, 2:30 P. M.* Musical program under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society.
- 8th, 7:30 P. M.* Free sketch class conducted by the Recreation Commission.
- 10th, 2:30 P. M.* Musical program under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society.
- 15th, 7:30 P. M.* Free sketch class conducted by the Recreation Commission.
- 17th, 2:30 P. M.* Musical program under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society. Detroit String Quartet.
- 20th, 8:30 P. M.* Reception and opening view of the Seventh Annual Exhibition of Selected Paintings by American Artists.
- 22nd, 7:30 P. M.* Free sketch class conducted by the Recreation Commission.
- 24th, 2:30 P. M.* Musical program under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society.
- 29th, 7:30 P. M.* Free sketch class conducted by the Recreation Commission.